



Excerpt taken from:

How to Be an American Housewife

By Margaret Dilloway

Preview available through Google Books.



Context: Event that causes the father of main character leaves his law practice, sell everything, and become a priest.

“Shush,” Nanny said soothingly, smoothing my bangs back. “We’re going on a trip to my hometown.” She looked down the road as though waiting for someone, or something. Her eyes glittered black onyx in the dim light. Taro began wailing and Nanny stuck a bottle into his mouth. “Go back to sleep, Shoko-chan.”

Something was not right. We had missed supper. Mother didn’t allow us to stay outside past dark. I stood. “You take us home right now!” I screamed.

“Sit down, sit down,” Nanny said, trying to push on my shoulders. “You bad girl, listen to Nanny.”

“No!” I kicked her in the shin as hard as I could, then pushed Taro’s pram back up the road. I knew the way home, even though it was far.

Nanny’s hand grabbed my arm and she lifted me up. Now she looked like a terrible witch, her wiry white hair free of her scarf, her jagged teeth bared like a wolf. “We’re going on a trip. You must listen to Nanny!”

I bit her hand, bearing down hard in desperation. She yowled and dropped me. I stood up and pushed Taro away again.

This time she didn’t follow. I looked back once and saw her standing in the middle of the road, holding her hand. Taro wailed.

Mother and Father were outside the wall of our house, looking left and right. They’d sent servants out looking for us. When they heard Taro, they ran to meet us. “Where have you been? Mother cried, sweeping me up. Father cradled Taro to his face. Taro quieted

“I told you she was no good!” I said and recounted what had happened.

Some mothers would have not believed their child, but mine did. Mother said she had tried to steal us. Or, at the very least steal my brother. Who knows what she would have done with me. “If it weren’t for Shoko,” Mother would re-tell visitors, shaking her head, “Ai!”

I was a hero. All because I wouldn’t listen.

. . .

WITHIN A YEAR OR SO AFTER THAT, Father tired of dealing with bad people in his business. “Too much cheating,” he told my mother. All anyone cares about is money. Money is God.”

He was always so busy. Perhaps he felt guilty that a nanny had almost made off with his children. He decided to sell the house and his practice and become a priest in the Konkokyo, the Konko Church.

In 1859, there was a Japanese village where people feared a god called Konjin, who brought misfortune. One farmer named Kawate Bunji had a streak of bad luck. Once when Bunji fell very ill, he was visited by the god Konjin, who told him that people shouldn’t hear him, that he was good, and that his real name was Tenchi Kane no Kami. “One True God of Heaven and Earth.” When Bunji became well, word of his visit from Konjin spread. People came to the farmer Bunji for help, and Tenchi Kane no Kami would speak through him. Bunji’s name became Konkokyo Daijin, and he became a god, too. The Konko Church was born.

Mother never made a word of complaint when Father became a priest. Instead, she sold the house and all of our fine possessions, bargaining a more than fair price—“It goes to the church and brings you honor, what more could you wish?” she told the buyer. She let me keep one doll, my Shirley Temple with curly hair Father had bought in Tokyo, the one that melted later when I left it too close to the fireplace. We moved to a tiny house with dirt floors covered by tatami mats. It was near the church in Ueki where my father would serve as priest. My sister, Suki, who was born that year, never knew a different life. I think that was why she was such a happy person. Or maybe it was because our parents never acted differently, rich or poor. Mother always made arrangements of flowers to brighten the room. We celebrated the festivals, with a little less feasting. Only I, with my memories of dolls and dresses, felt resentment.